

(2 Kings) Two Lepers and the Blind Men

by David Guzik

Naaman, a successful but leper Syrian general, is healed of his leprosy by Elisha, a prophet of God, and learns to trust in the power of God.

Duration: 53:02

Scripture: 2 Kings 5:11-13, 2 Kings 6:8-10, 2 Kings 6:20, 2 Kings 6:33

Topics: "Faith And Miracles", "Gods Mercy"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the story of the king of Israel's anger and desperation during a famine. The king initially blames the people for their situation, but eventually realizes that the calamity is from the Lord. Despite his doubts, the speaker emphasizes that God is merciful, gracious, and powerful. The sermon also highlights the importance of faith and active participation in God's miracles. The story of the lost iron axe head is used as an example of how God can turn a significant loss into a miraculous recovery.

Transcript

Tonight, we take a look at 2 Kings chapters 5 and 6. This is really one of those interesting sections of the book of 2 Kings, because it actually doesn't really have that much to do with the kings of Israel or Judah at all. We're not going to see much of the kings of Judah tonight, one bit, a little bit of one of the kings of Israel. Mostly, this has to do with the prophet Elisha, the second one, and dealing with his relationships with some of the people around in his life.

So let's just jump right into it. 2 Kings chapter 5, verse 1. Now Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Syria, was a great and honorable man in the eyes of his master, because by him the Lord had given victory to Syria. He was also a mighty man of valor, but a leper.

Naaman was the chief military commander of a nation that was a persistent enemy to the kingdom of both Israel and Judah. As recently as the days of Ahab and Jehoshaphat, Syria had fought and won against the kingdom of Israel. His position and his success against Israel and some of the other neighboring nations made him a great and honorable man, as it says there in verse 1, and personally, he was a mighty man of valor.

He was a wonderful, significant, strong, good man. By the way, that phrase, a mighty man of valor, you may recognize it from other passages in the Old Testament. The same title was applied to Gideon, to

Jephthah, to David, to Jeroboam, to Eliezea, one of David's mighty men.

But it seems that this is the only specific Gentile to whom this title was given. And so, Naaman was a great military man representing the pagan nation of Syria. He had a lot of good things going for him, but when you read the last few words of verse 1, you see what the big problem in his life was.

It says, but a leper. A lot going for him, but what he had against him was devastating. He was a leper, which meant that he had a horrible, incurable disease that would slowly result in his death.

No matter how good, no matter how successful Naaman was in everything else in his life, he was a leper. It's as if here he is at the top of the world, at the top of his career, at the top of everything in his life, and then he gets the note from the doctor, you have cancer and you're going to be dead in a few weeks or a few months. Ancient leprosy in some ways, though, was worse than cancer.

Because cancer kills sort of silently. It works on the inside. Its results aren't as apparent on the outside.

But leprosy, everybody could see what was going on. It began as small white spots on the skin. And before too long, the spots begin to get bigger and bigger and more and more white in their appearance.

They get sort of a shiny or scaly appearance. And then the spots will spread all over the body and the hair begins to fall out. First it falls out from the head, and then it falls even from your eyebrows.

As things get worse with leprosy, your fingernails and toenails become loose and fall off. They develop sort of a rot on your fingers and toes. And then the joints of your fingers and toes begin to rot.

And you begin to lose fingers and toes at the very joints. Your gums begin to shrink and they can't hold your teeth anymore. And so each one of your teeth is lost one by one.

And then leprosy will keep eating away at your face until literally your nose, the roof of your mouth, and even your eyes will rot away. And you'll just waste away until you're dead. But he was a leper.

That's a pretty big but, isn't it right there? So what happens with Naaman here? Well look, verse 2. And the Syrians had gone out on raids and brought back captive a young girl from the land of Israel. She waited on Naaman's wife. Then she said to her mistress, If only my master were with the prophet who is in Samaria, for he would heal him of his leprosy.

Now I think of some of the quiet or anonymous or unheralded heroes in the Bible. I think this young girl who was taken captive from the land of Israel and brought back to Syria. She's one of the more obscure heroes of the Bible.

Here she is. She's an unwilling missionary. She never signed up to be a missionary to the Syrians.

But she was taken away as a captive. And by the way, to be taken away as a captive meant a lot. It meant that probably she saw her very own family killed in front of her eyes.

Her brothers. Her father. She may have seen her own mother horribly abused.

She may have been abused herself. And she was taken away as a captive in this house. And yet, despite all these irreplaceable losses for her, there was no doubt that God used her marvelously.

And she was an outstanding example of a faithful witness in a very difficult circumstance. She cared enough to speak up. And she had faith enough to say that Elisha would heal Naaman of his leprosy.

Wonderful testimony that the young girl gave. You can imagine that if this failed, she would be put in a very bad position. But she had the faith to say it.

No, you can be healed of this leprosy. Anyway, now, verse four. And Naaman went in and told his master, saying, Thus and thus said the girl who was from the land of Israel.

Then the king of Syria said, Go now, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel. So he departed and took with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten changes of clothing. Then he brought the letter to the king of Israel, which said, Now be advised when this letter comes to you that I have sent Naaman my servant to you, that you may heal him of his leprosy.

And as it happened, when the king of Israel read the letter, that he tore his clothes and said, Am I God to kill and make alive that this man sends a man to me and to heal him of his leprosy? Therefore, please consider and see how he seeks a quarrel with me. Well, when you consider the record of the wars between Israel and Syria described in the previous chapters of 2 Kings and of 1 Kings, it seems strange that the king of Syria would send a letter of recommendation with General Naaman down to the kingdom of Israel. But it definitely seems that this is how desperate Naaman was.

This is how much his king loved him and wanted him to be healed of his leprosy. So he sent him down there not only with the leather, but with a great fortune. One commentator that I read estimates that the amount of money that he sent him down with in today's terms would be something like 1.2 million dollars.

That's how desperate he was to have his commander healed of his leprosy. And so he just says in the letter, Hey, I've sent Naaman my servant to you that you may heal him of his leprosy. Can you imagine how the king of Israel felt when he read that? I'm supposed to heal him of his leprosy? I don't even hardly worship the God of Israel.

I'm more into Baal, I'm more into Ashtoreth, I'm more into these pagan gods. It was obviously out of his power to heal Naaman's leprosy. But secondly, he knew the one who had the power to do it, and that was Elisha.

But what kind of relationship did Elisha and the king of Israel have? Not a very good relationship. And so he thought, you know what? The king of Syria, he's just trying to pick a fight with me. He's just trying to stir up trouble.

I find it interesting that the king of Syria assumed that the king of Israel was in a much better relationship with Elisha than he really was. You know, he figured, look, here's the most notable prophet in your land. You're the king.

Surely you guys have a good relationship. Isn't it easy for other people to assume that we have a better relationship with God than we really do? I mean, they just look, oh, well, sure, you have a good relationship with your king. Not necessarily.

But anyway, that was the assumption that the king of the Syrians made. So now verse 8. So it was when Elisha, the man of God, heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, that he sent to the king, saying, Why have you torn your clothes? Please let him come to me. He shall know that there is a prophet in

Israel.

Then Naaman went with his horses and his chariot, and he stood at the door of Elisha's house. And you can just picture the scene in your mind, right? If you're bringing \$1.2 million and all these changes of clothes and all the rest of it, you're bringing a lot of servants with you to manage all of that. And so Elisha says, Well, send him over to me.

He comes over with this great, great company of men with him. Naaman would never know that there was a true prophet in Israel if he would have just hung around the royal palace. The true prophet in Israel wasn't welcome at the royal palace.

So he had to go from the palace to the house of Elisha. And when he does, he finds that Elisha is there. By the way, I love what Elisha said to the king of Israel there in verse 8, when he says, you know, or excuse me, verse 9. He says, Please let him come to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel.

It's as if he's saying to the king of Israel, Look, this is a crisis to you, king. No wonder you tore your clothes. It's a crisis to you because you have no contact with the God who has the power to heal lepers.

But it's a needless crisis. You could have a relationship with God, but you don't. So Naaman comes to the door of Elisha the prophet.

Look at it here in verse 10. And Elisha sent a messenger to him saying, Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored to you, and you shall be clean. Did you catch that? Did you see what he said? Told him to do right there.

Verse 10. Elisha sent a messenger. He wouldn't even answer the door.

You know, I picture Naaman there, and there's some guys around him. And, you know, Naaman used to have people doing for him. So he says to one of his servants, Knock on the door.

And the servant goes, and he knocks on the door. And then what does he see? He sees a guy, and he thinks, Oh, you must be Elisha. And then the guy says, No, no, I'm not Elisha.

My master Elisha says to you. And he delivers the message. He wouldn't even see him face to face.

And Naaman took the trouble to come to the home of Elisha. But Elisha refused to give him a personal audience. He sent him a messenger instead.

And that was humbling to Naaman. He was used to being honored. Look at it now, verse 11.

But Naaman became furious. Oh, by the way, maybe we should look at verse 10. What he told him to do.

He said, Go wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored to you, and you shall be clean. Well, that's strange. Just go wash in the Jordan River.

He could have thought of that himself. Is it really that simple? So he became furious, as we read here in verse 11. But Naaman became furious and went away and said, Indeed, I said to myself, he will surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God and wave his hand over the place and heal the leprosy.

Are not the Abna and the Tharfar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage. Now, I want you to notice something. Did Elisha command Naaman to do something that was difficult? No, it wasn't hard to do.

Something that was beyond his ability? No, no, no, no, no. What if he would have said to Naaman, I want you to crawl on your knees over broken glass to the top of Mount Hermon. Naaman probably would have said, I'll do it.

Something hard, something difficult. But it was something simple. There was nothing hard in the action itself.

What was hard in what he told Naaman to do was it was difficult in that it required humility. And it was hard because Naaman had it all figured out, didn't he? In his great need, he did what nearly all of us do. He started to anticipate the way that God would answer the prayer, right? He had it all worked out in his mind.

Okay, I'm going to come. I'll knock on the door of the prophet. The prophet will come out.

We'll exchange greetings. He'll pray for me. He'll call on the name of his God.

In his whole mind, he pictures this. He even says it right there in verse 11. He says he'll wave his hand over the place and heal the leprosy.

He even has pictures, the gestures that Elisha is going to make in his mind. He knows all how it's going to happen. You see, the problem was, was that when it didn't happen that way, he was offended.

Isn't that the great danger in our own anticipation of how God will work? We say, Oh, Lord, deliver me and do this and this and this and this. And that's what I need. Isn't it a better prayer to preach? Oh, Lord, deliver me.

You know how. You know what's best. Sometimes I wonder if God doesn't have his deliverance right in front of us, but because we have planned it according to a different agenda, we can't even see his deliverance in front of us.

Well, anyway, in verse 12, it tells us that he went away in a rage. He said, listen, I've got better rivers in Damascus. The Jordan isn't that great of a river.

And by the way, it isn't that great of a river. And so he says, you know, I can find a better river in Damascus. I don't need any of this.

I want nothing to do with Elisha. If the answer was washing in a river, there's better rivers in my own country. I don't need any of this.

So he goes away angry. Verse 13. And his servants came near and spoke to him and said, my father, if the prophet had told you to do something great, would you not have done it? How much more when he says to you, wash and be clean? Thank God for faithful subordinates who will speak to their superiors in such a way.

And Ammon was obviously angry, yet his servants were bold enough to give him the good advice that he needed to hear. And what did he needed to hear? Well, this simple advice. If the prophet had told you to do something great, would you not have done it? It's a brilliantly logical approach.

If Elisha had called upon Naaman to sacrifice a hundred or a thousand animals to the God of Israel, Naaman would have done it. He would have done it immediately. But because the request was simple, because the request was humbling, he didn't want to have anything to do with it.

So look at it now. Verse 14, So he went down and dipped seven times in the Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God, and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean. Naaman did exactly what Elisha told him to do.

Therefore, you could say that each dunk, each time he went under the water of the River Jordan, it was like a step of faith. He was trusting in the Word of God through the prophet. Actually, in the ancient Hebrew, it's even more expressive.

It said that he plunged into the River Jordan. He didn't just put himself calmly under. He almost went under violently.

He said, Well, if I'm supposed to go under the water seven times, I'm going to go under with all of my strength. I like this in a wonderful sermon that Spurgeon preached on this passage. He says that Naaman was attacked by two different enemies here.

The first enemy was proud self. Proud self demanded that Elisha come out and see him. And then he was attacked by evil questioning who questioned why he should wash in the Jordan when he had better rivers back home.

Naaman overcame these two enemies, and then he received what God wanted him to receive. It's the same with us. You have to overcome proud self and evil questioning before you receive what God wants you to receive.

And Naaman certainly did. It says, When he came up, his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean. Naaman's response of faith was generously rewarded.

God answered his faith with complete and miraculous healing. By the way, did you notice something? Where's Elisha? He's back at home. He's sitting down having something cold to drink.

He made it very clear that this was not Elisha's miracle. Right? He wasn't even there. Elisha intended it to happen in a way that would prove to Naaman that this was the God of Israel who healed him and not the prophet of God.

Well, verse 15, And he returned to the man of God, he and all his aides, and came and stood before him. And he said, Indeed, now I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel. And now therefore, please take a gift from your servant.

But he said, As the Lord lives before whom I stand, I will receive nothing. And he urged him to take it, but he refused. We have to give compliments to Naaman here, right? What a fine display of gratitude.

What does he do? He's healed. He says, Whoa! I've got to get back to Damascus and show everybody how I'm healed. No, he says, No, I have to go back to the prophet of God and thank him.

He's like the one leper out of the ten. When Jesus healed ten lepers and only one came back to thank him, he was also a foreigner, like the one thankful leper of Luke chapter 17. And so he comes, and gladly he comes out and he says, Listen, Elisha, I just want to thank you.

By the way, it says there, He returned to the man of God and stood before him. You know, before he expected Elisha to come out to him. Now he ran out to meet Elisha wherever he was.

So anyway, he makes this glorious proclamation. He says, I know that there's no God in all the earth except in Israel. It wasn't just the healing that persuaded Naaman of this.

It was the healing connected with the word of the prophet. Together, those things showed Naaman that the God Elisha represented was the true God in all of the earth. And so he said, I want to thank you.

Please take a gift from your servant. Now, we have to say, Naaman only meant well from this gesture, right? There was nothing wrong in Naaman's heart for wanting to give a gift to Elisha. He felt that it was appropriate to support the ministry of the man of God whom the Lord had used so greatly to bring healing.

However, Elisha steadfastly insisted, I'm not going to receive anything from you. God told him, no, don't receive anything from Naaman. And so he did not.

Now, verse 70. So Naaman said, Then if not, please let your servant be given two mule loads of earth. For your servant will no longer offer either burnt offering or sacrifice to other gods but to the Lord.

Yet in this thing, may the Lord pardon your servant. When my master goes into the temple of Rimmon to worship there, and he leans on my hand and I bow down in the temple of Rimmon, when I bow down in the temple of Rimmon, may the Lord please pardon your servant in this thing. And then he said to him, Go in peace.

So he departed from him a short distance. I think Naaman is a perfect example here of a superstitious new believer. He held the common opinion in the ancient world that particular deities, particular gods, had their own territory that they were sovereign over.

And he figures, the God of Israel is sovereign over the land of Israel. So I'm going to take some of the land of Israel back with me to Syria. That's what he wanted with the two mule loads of earth.

So he says, oh great, I can worship the God of Israel so much better if I bring some of the dirt of Israel with me and then I can stand on the land of Israel even when I'm in Syria and I can worship the true God. And then he says, now listen, when I go to the temple of Rimmon, may the Lord please pardon your servant in this thing. You see, as an official in the government of Syria, Naaman was expected to participate in the worship of the Syrian gods.

And so he asked Elisha for allowance to direct his heart to Yahweh even when he was in the temple of Rimmon. And what did Elisha say? He said, go in peace. I've got to say, this was a wise answer.

He didn't specifically say yes. He didn't specifically say no. But he gave a generally approving answer.

It seems that what Elisha did here was he left the matter up to Naaman and God. Maybe he trusted that the Lord would personally convict Naaman of this and that the Lord would give him the integrity and the strength to avoid idolatry. You should know that there are some Bible scholars, some commentators, who believe that what Naaman was actually asking for was forgiveness for previous idolatry that he committed and not forgiveness ahead of time for idolatry that he had not yet committed.

Apparently, the Hebrew will allow for this kind of a translation though it's not the most natural way to understand the text. But listen, I don't know. I believe that basically what Elisha did here was he said,

listen, this is going to be between you and the Lord.

Go in peace. So he leaves. Verse 20, But Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, the man of God, said, Look, my master has spared Naaman the Syrian while not receiving from his hands what he brought.

But as the Lord lives, I will run after him and take something from him. So Gehazi pursued Naaman. When Naaman saw him running after him, he got down from the chariot to meet him.

He said, It's all well. And he said, All is well? My master sent me, saying, Indeed, just now two young men of the sons of the prophets have come to me from the mountains of Ephraim. Please give them a talent of silver and two changes of garments.

So Naaman said, Please take two talents. And he urged him, and he bound two talents of silver in two bags with two changes of garments and handed them to two of his servants, and they carried them on ahead of him. When he came to the citadel, he took them from their hand and stored them away to the house, and he let the men go, and they departed.

Ah, interesting story here, right? Elisha's servant Gehazi says, Listen, my master might be crazy enough to turn down \$1.2 million, but there's no reason why I shouldn't get a piece of this pie. Gehazi was probably shocked that his master refused anything from such a wealthy and influential and grateful man. He said, Listen, even if you don't want the \$1.2 million, take some of it.

Gehazi probably figured that somebody should benefit from such an opportunity, and so he took the initiative to run after Naaman and to take something from him. Listen, Gehazi probably thought that Elisha deserved a reward. Look at what he says in verse 20.

He says, Look, my master has spared Naaman the Syrian. But you see, he actually became exactly what Elisha avoided. He became somebody who took something from Naaman on this occasion.

He put Elisha in too high of a place. And so he goes and he makes this request. Oh, please, I want one talent of silver and two changes of garments.

Of course, basing it on the lie that these visitors have come in and all of this. So he asked for one talent of silver. And what does Naaman say? He says, Oh, take two.

I bet you anything I know exactly what Gehazi thought right then. He thought, Oh, praise the Lord. The Lord is really blessing this.

I only asked for one and he's going to give me two. By the way, the fact that he had to hand it to two of his servants shows that it was a lot of silver. It was probably 120 pounds of silver.

And so what did he do? He came back to the citadel and he stored them away in the house and he deliberately hid them from Elisha. You know why he deliberately hid them? Because Gehazi knew that he had done wrong. Now, you got to say, isn't this about the most foolish thing you could do? Hide something from Elisha? Isn't this the man that he's been with long enough to know that you just can't hide things from this man? So anyway, verse 25.

So he went in and stood before his master. Elisha said to him, Where did you go, Gehazi? And he said, Your servant did not go anywhere. Then he said to him, Did not my heart go with you when the man turned back from his chariot to meet you? Is it time to receive money and to receive clothing, olive groves

and vineyards, sheep and oxen, male and female servants? Therefore the leprosy of Naaman shall cling to you and your descendants forever.

And he ran out from his presence leprous as white as snow. Elisha knew. We don't know how he knew.

We don't know if he knew it was supernatural knowledge. We don't know if he just gained it from observation and knowing Gehazi's character. One way or another, Elisha knew.

All of Gehazi's attempts to cover his sin failed. I find it very interesting what he says to him there in verse 26. He says, Is it time to receive money? It seems that Elisha had no absolute law against receiving support from those who were touched by his ministry.

It's not like he said, Well, I would never receive a gift from anybody. That wasn't it. But it was spiritually clear to Elisha and it should have been clear to Gehazi that it was not the appropriate time and circumstance.

It was much more important to be a good witness to Naaman in this situation than to receive the financial support. And so he says, Is it time for money and clothing and olive groves and vineyards and sheep and oxen and male and female servants? Now, obviously, Gehazi did not bring all of those things back with him from visiting Naaman. But he wanted all of those things.

And Elisha exposed his greedy heart. Can you just see Gehazi going back and thinking about the olive groves and thinking about the clothing and thinking about the vineyards and all of this? And Elisha and, of course, the Lord knew his heart. And so he exposed it.

And the same judgment came upon him. Therefore, the leprosy of Naaman shall cling to you and to your descendants forever. I have to say, that was a very severe judgment.

But as a man in ministry, Gehazi was under a stricter judgment. When he allowed himself to covet what Naaman had, he thought only in terms of the money that Naaman possessed. God allowed him to keep the riches.

But He also gave him the other thing that Naaman had. Severe leprosy. Can you just imagine Gehazi? He looks at Naaman.

Oh, man, that's the life. Look at all the money. Look at all the power.

Look at all the influence. I wish I had some of that. And God said, well, you want to keep the money? You can keep it, Gehazi.

I want you to notice, nowhere in the text does it tell us that this money was taken away from him. Sure, you can have the money. You can have his leprosy, too.

So, that was the curse of the ungodly servant, Gehazi. Here you see a pagan who by an act of faith is cured of leprosy. And an Israelite who by an act of dishonor is cursed with leprosy.

Which brings us into chapter 6. And the sons of the prophet said to Elijah, See now the place where we dwell with you is too small for us. Please let us go to the Jordan and let every man take a bean from there and let us make a place where we may dwell. So he answered, go.

Then one said, Please consent to go with your servants. And he answered, I will go. This indicates that at this time apparently Elijah is having a significant impact on the nation.

The old facility for housing the sons of the prophets was not large enough to meet the needs of everybody who wanted to be trained in the ministry. And so he said, we need more space. We need more room.

Let's expand. And so Elijah said, Well, OK, we'll do it. And I'll go with you and we'll get this building project underway.

Verse 4. So he went with them. And when they came to the Jordan, they cut down trees. But as one was cutting down a tree, the iron axe head fell into the water and he cried out.

And he said, Alas, Master, for it was borrowed. So the man of God said, Where did it fall? And he showed him the place. So he cut off a stick, threw it in there, and he made the iron float.

Therefore, he said, Pick it up for yourself. So he reached out his hand and took it. Now, it was a very significant loss to have this iron axe head fall into the water.

Iron was certainly present in Israel at the time, but it wasn't common enough to be cheap. And so when the axe head went into the water, it was a catastrophe. And the man said, Oh, it's even worse because it was borrowed.

He was rightly sensitive to the fact that if you borrow something, you should take better care of it than if it's yourself. So what did Elisha do? Cut off a stick, threw it in there, and he made the iron float. Now, this was an obvious and a unique miracle.

There was no trickery in the way that Elisha put the stick in the water. It was simply an expression of faith that God honored. Oh, it's very interesting to read through the commentators and have them try to come up with naturalistic explanations of how somehow there's some scientific principle there.

Let me tell you, there's no science to it other than just the science of God's miracles. God can do everything. He can make iron swim.

You can't make it swim, but the prophet did. And he did it by the use of a stick. I don't know how he did it.

I don't know how the two things were connected, but it happened. But you know what I like best in this story? I like the very last little line there where he says, Pick it up for yourself. I don't know about you, but if I'm Elisha, I know how I'm going to do the miracle.

I'm going to bring the axe head up to the top of the water, and then I'm going to levitate it out of the river and bring it right over to the ground from whence it fell, and then everybody would be even more amazed. He didn't do it that way, did he? He brought it up to a place where some man could come and pick it up with his hand, and then he had to do it. You see, this miracle worked in a familiar way.

God did the part that only he could do, but he left a man to do the part that man could do. He wanted this man, the son of the prophets, to participate in some way in the miracle. That's how Elisha worked.

All right, now on to verse 8. Now, the king of Syria was making war against Israel, and he consulted with his servants, saying, My camp will be in such and such a place. And the man of God sent to the king of Israel, saying, Beware that you do not pass this place, for the Syrians are coming down there. Then the

king of Israel sent someone to the place of which the man of God had told him.

Thus he warned him, and he was watchful there, not just once or twice. Therefore the heart of the king of Syria was greatly troubled by this thing. And he called his servants and said to them, Will you not show me which of us is for the king of Israel? And one of his servants said, None, my lord, O king.

But Elisha the prophet, who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the words that you speak in your bedroom. So he said, Go and see where he is, that I may send and get him. And it was told him, saying, Surely he is in Dothan.

Well, here you have Elisha doing some supernatural spying work on behalf of the kingdom of Israel. Elisha didn't support the corrupt monarchs of Israel, but he knew that it would be even worse for Israel to be conquered by this pagan nation of Syria. Therefore he gave the king of Israel information from divinely inspired espionage.

I guess that's the only way you would call it. And so, you know, he's tipping off the Israelite army about these different attacks or ambushes from the people of Syria. And he was very angry at this, the king of Syria was.

The king of Syria was actually mystified by the way that the king of Israel knew all the serious plans beforehand. He was convinced that there was a traitor in their midst until one of his servant revealed to him that he lies to the prophet who is in Israel, knew and revealed those things. Matter of fact, he says, you know, you can't even whisper something to your wife in your bedroom, and he doesn't know what it is that you're saying, which may have been an exaggeration, but in any regard, verse 14.

Therefore, he sent horses and chariots and a great army there, and they came by night and surrounded the city. And when the servant of the man of God arose early and went on, there was an army surrounding the city with horses and chariots. And his servant said to him, Alas, my master, what shall we do? So he answered, Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.

And Elisha prayed and said, Lord, I pray, open his eyes that he may see. Then the Lord opened the eyes of the young man and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. You can just picture this in your mind, can't you? The mighty army surrounding the home of Elisha all around in the area.

It looks like there's thousands of troops around. And when Elisha's servant saw all the horses and chariots and the great army from Syria surrounding their city, he was naturally afraid. He said, listen, there's no way of escaping.

The soldiers are everywhere. And then what did God say to Elisha to say to the servant? Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them. This seemed unbelievable to Elisha's servant.

He could see the horses. He could see the chariots. He could see the great army surrounding them.

He could not see anyone who was with himself or with Elisha. He said, what are you saying, those who are with us? There's nobody with us. It's me and you.

Is there a mouse in your pocket or something? I don't know what you're talking about. There's nobody with us here. I want you to notice too that Elisha gave his servant a reason to not be afraid.

He didn't just say, well, cheer up. It's not so bad. It was bad.

But there was a greater spiritual fact there and the greater spiritual fact was revealed by the prayer, Lord, I pray, open his eyes that he may see. I want you to notice something. God, excuse me, Elisha did not pray to God that God would change anything in the situation.

His only request was that his servant could see the reality of the situation. Elisha's prayer did not change anything in the circumstances. It only changed the servant's perception of things.

You see, the servant could not have this explained to him, nor could he be persuaded into it. He had to see it. I see the difference between me and Elisha.

I would have put my arm around the servant and say, look, friend, you can't see them, but everywhere around there, there are heavenly armies surrounding us and helping us. There's angels everywhere. I just know it.

I can see it. You can't see them, but trust me, they're there. The servant would have said, what, are you crazy? The right prayer to pray was, Lord, open his eyes.

Let him see the reality for what it was. And when the Lord did open the eyes of the young man, he saw God answered Elisha's prayer. You know, when a person is blind to spiritual reality, only God can open their eyes.

God may do it through the word someone speaks, but the work of spiritually opening eyes is spiritual work and it belongs to God alone. And when his eyes were opened, he could see it. He saw the mountains full of horses and chariots of fire.

Oh, sure, the Syrians had mountains, excuse me, had horses and chariots, but God's side had chariots of fire on their side. The servant saw the reality that he could not see before. He saw that there were really more with him and Elisha than those assembled against them.

I want you to think about this for a moment. The fact that the servant of Elisha could not see that army before did not make it less real. If there's 50 people who don't see something, it doesn't invalidate the perception of one person who can see it.

That army was there all along, even when the servant could not see it. Listen, faith is not imagining unreal things. Faith is the ability to see things which cannot be learned by our own senses, but are real.

Those chariots, those horses, those were real. They were actually there. And then he could see them not only with the eye of faith, but he could also see them with his perception eye because of this answer of prayer.

Listen, the fact that you don't see spiritual things does not prove that they're not there. There's a old story that a preacher tells about an Irishman who's on trial for murder and four different witnesses saw him commit the murder. And so the Irishman pleaded, I'm not guilty and I wish to establish my innocence.

I can produce 40 people who didn't see me commit the murder. And he thought that would help. Well, listen, if there's 40 people saying that God isn't moving, that God isn't working, it doesn't invalidate the fact that four people see that He is.

Horses and chariots in that day were the most sophisticated, mighty military instruments of the day. But the invisible army of God had even more firepower than the army of the Syrians. And so he sees them.

They were there. So verse 18, now the servant feels a lot better, right? So when the Syrians came down to him, Elisha prayed to the Lord and said, Strike this people, I pray, with blindness. And he struck them with blindness according to the word of Elisha.

Now Elisha said to them, This is not the way nor this is the city. Follow me and I will bring you to the man whom you seek. But he led them to Samaria, which was the capital city of the northern kingdom of Israel.

So it was when they had come to Samaria that Elisha said, Lord, open the eyes of these men that they may see. And the Lord opened their eyes and they saw. And there they were inside Samaria.

Now when the king of Israel saw them, he said to Elisha, My father, shall I kill them? Shall I kill them? But he answered, You shall not kill them. Would you kill those whom you have taken captive with your sword and your bow? Set food and water before them that they may eat and drink and go to their master. So he prepared a great feast for them.

And after they ate and drank, he sent them away and they went to their master. So the bands of the Syrian raiders came no more to the land of Israel. The Syrian army could not see the spiritual army all around.

So they were not afraid to attack Elisha and his servant. But just as God was able to give sight to the blind spiritual perception of Elisha's servant, he was also able to give blindness to the physical perception of the Syrians. And that's what he did.

Struck them blind. Leaves them inside the city of Samaria where Elisha and the king of Israel very wisely showed remarkable kindness, remarkable generosity to these men in not killing them, in answering the evil that they came with, with good, and it successfully changed the policy that they had in Israel at that time where it says at the end, so the bands of Syrian raiders came no more into the land of Israel. That was defeated by the kindness of the prophet.

Verse 24 And it happened after this that Ben-Hadad, king of Syria, gathered all of his army and went up and besieged Samaria. And there was a great famine in Samaria. And indeed they besieged it until a donkey's head was sold for 80 shekels of silver and one fourth of a cob of dove droppings for five shekels of silver.

Then as the king of Israel was passing by on the wall, a woman cried out to him saying, Help my lord, O king! And he said, If the lord does not help you, where can I find help for you? From the threshing floor? From the wine press? Then the king said to her, What is troubling you? And she answered, This woman said to me, Give your son that we may eat him today and we will eat my son tomorrow. So we boiled my son, ate him, and I said to her on the next day, Give your son that we may eat him, but she has hidden her son. Ben-Hadad, the king of the Syrians, came against Israel once again.

Apparently he forgot very quickly about Elisha's great kindness. It changed the heart of the Syrian raiders as it says there at the end of verse 29, or excuse me, verse 23, but it did not change the heart of the

Syrian king. So he launched a large, full-scale attack against his neighbor to the south.

And it tells us there in verse 24, that he besieged Samaria. And this was the common method of attack in those days against a securely walled city. A siege was intended to surround the city, prevent all business and trade from either entering or leaving the city, and eventually they would starve the population into surrender.

And so after months of siege, there's no more food left in Samaria. They've eaten everything that they have. And there was a great famine in the city.

The siege strategy was working. The famine was so bad that a donkey's head or dove droppings became so expensive that only the rich people could afford them. It's a very, very difficult thing to say that the donkey's head or dove poop should be something valuable.

But that's how bad the hunger was in the city. Matter of fact, it got so bad that we have this horrible, horrible scene of the woman complaining to the king, saying, Listen, me and my friends, you know, we have our two sons and we agreed to eat them. We ate my son yesterday, and now she's hidden her son.

This shows how terrible the famine was. Mothers were so hungry that they ate their own children. It's a bad, bad time for the nation of Israel.

Why did they get to such a desperate place? I'll tell you why they got to such a desperate place. Because of their own disobedience. Remember, this is the northern kingdom of Israel, right? Ungodly king after ungodly king after ungodly king.

How many godly kings did the northern kingdom have? Zero. The people were apostate. The prophets did the best that they could.

The best that you could say about the northern kingdom was there was a remnant of godly people. In the book of Deuteronomy, chapter 28, there's an extended section where God warns Israel about the curses that would come upon them if they rejected the covenant that He made with them. And part of that chapter describes the horrors that we read in this chapter.

Let me read this to you. It's from Deuteronomy, chapter 28, starting at verse 52. They shall besiege you at all your gates until your high and fortified walls, in which you trust, come down throughout all your land.

And they shall besiege you at all your gates throughout all your land, which the Lord your God has given you. You shall eat the fruit of your own body, the flesh of your sons and your daughters, whom the Lord your God has given you in the siege that the desperate straits in which your enemy shall distress you. This was the direct product of Israel's disobedience.

It didn't have to be this way. But actually, if I may say, it was the way that Israel wanted it because they disobeyed the Lord. This could have been turned around incredibly quickly if they would have just obeyed the God.

As a matter of fact, we're going to see in not too long, we're going to see that it did turn around because of the obedience of just a few. That God was faithful and merciful to Israel even when His judgment came upon them exactly as He had promised. So the terrors came upon Israel because they disobeyed, rejected God, and abandoned the covenant that He had made with them.

Verse 30 Now it happened when the king heard the words of the woman that he tore his clothes and as he passed by on the wall, the people looked and there underneath he had sackcloth on his body. Then he said, God do so to me and more also if the head of Elisha, the son of Shaphat, remains on him today. But Elisha was sitting in his house and the elders were sitting with him.

And the king sent a man ahead of him. But before the messenger came to him, he said to the elders, Do you see how this son of a murderer has sent someone to take away my head? Look, when the messenger comes, shut the door and hold him fast at the door. Is not the sound of his master's feet behind him? And while he was still talking with them, there was the messenger coming down to him.

And when the king said, Surely this calamity is from the Lord. Why should I wait for the Lord any longer? I find the king of Israel here to be a fascinating psychological study. He's in deep distress.

You can't blame the king for being grieved when his own people are eating their children, when they're bringing to him the disagreements about which child to eat. And he tears his clothes and underneath it's sackcloth. It shows how greatly he had been grieved by all of this, how much he had inflicted himself.

Yet what is the one thing he would not do? He would not turn to the Lord. That sackcloth that he was wearing next to his skin as a sign of mourning. Was he mourning before the God of Israel whom he had defended? No, he was probably mourning to his pagan gods.

Here's a man in a desperate place, needing some help, looking out for some kind of supernatural help. But instead of turning to the Lord, he turns to other broken things. Matter of fact, he turns out against the Lord.

And who does he blame for his problems? Does he blame himself? Does he say, listen, we need to call for a citywide day of prayer and repentance to the Lord. We're already fasting, so we'll just carry that in and repent and pray to the Lord. We need to give back to the God of Israel.

He has defended us before. He will defend us again. That's what he should have done.

What did he say instead? Get me the head of Elisha. That was his command. The king was angry, but he wasn't angry with himself.

He wasn't angry with Israel. He wasn't angry with their sin. He was angry against the prophet of God.

Isn't that just like human nature? You know, we get ourselves into a whole mess of trouble with sin. And then who do we blame? We blame the people who exposed the sin. We blame the people that brought it out into the open.

Instead of blaming ourselves. I suggest to you that the king of Israel had every reason to be angry here at the end of chapter 6. He was just angry at the wrong person. Now, at least at the end of the chapter, he's honest enough to admit that his anger is really from against the Lord.

He says, Surely this calamity is from the Lord. Why should I wait for the Lord any longer? Well, I'll tell you why. Because God is merciful.

God is gracious. And God is a God of awesome power and wonder. What if I were to tell you that this desperate famine that they're in at the end of chapter 6 could be turned around in a matter of hours.

And not only could there be food once again in Samaria, but there would be an overflow of food. Well, that's really how it's going to work out. And that's what we'll look at next week when we get together for chapter 7 and 8 and see one of the most wonderful, remarkable answers to prayer curiously again with a leper one more time.

But I want you to see here. Over and over again we find the miraculous power of God at work in the book of 2 Kings. In particular, in these two chapters we find many miracles.

But what I want you to notice is that Elisha was determined to do these miracles in a way that people would have to step out in faith and accept it. That's how he worked with Naaman, right? You have to dunk yourself under. That's how he worked with the floating ax head.

That's how he worked time and time again. Yes, God will do the miracle, but he does it in a way that invites or maybe I should even say commands our participation of faith. That's what's up to us to give to him.

To participate in faith and see God work these great miracles. Let's pray. Father, it's amazing to think of what you did in these chapters, Lord.

Not just that you can make an iron ax head to float in water. Not just that you can heal a man of leprosy. Lord, I suppose I'm most impressed by the way that you can open our blind eyes so that we can see the spiritual reality around us.

Lord, we know that the word of God says that we're surrounded by an angelic host right now. Father, it's not that we demand to see them with our physical eyes. More so, Lord, we pray that you make us aware of them with our spiritual perception.

We want to know that you are for us and that you send forth these servants on our behalf. Thank you, Lord, for your word. Thank you for how you draw faith out of us in response to your word.

We pray it tonight, thanking you in Jesus' name. Amen.

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